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1904

A Book of Verse

John Lewis March

Boston: Richard G. Badger

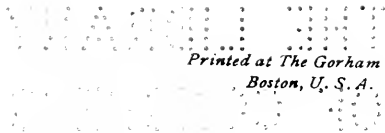
The Gorham Press

1904

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*Printed at The Gorham Press
Boston, U. S. A.*

TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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Evening

Now wend the great rose-glories toward the west,
And darkness rises in the shady hollows ;
And like a Beowulfian monster wallows,
Ere it uprear its gray and misty crest.

Hark how where billowy woods move wind-
carest,
And where the fallow field the brooklet swal-
lows,
A full clear sound of vesper music follows,
God's dear wild things looking up to be blest.

And wanderers look up, along the way,
With pure-felt joy, with comforted desire,
Blessing the sweetness of their toil's release ;
That after all the passions of the day,
Follows the evening rest, the covered fire,
And God's sure love holding the world in
peace.

May Morning

The heavens only frown this morn of spring,
I hear the robin's chirrup, chirrup gay,
The thrush repeats his liquid, lilting lay,
And swallows twitter on excited wing.
Do ye not see the darkness threatening;
Nor feel the rain-drops of that sullen gray?
In the cold dawn what is it ye would say?
Why are ye loud with joy? Come, speak this thing!
And yet, what songs well of mere circumstance?
Ye sing because ye must — because the unrest
Of love in the ardent spring-time pricks your
hearts.
And love grows joyous in this drear mischance,
Which oft beneath a frowning heaven best —
Aye, near despair — displays its tuneful arts.

With A Roman Lamp

Though in the darkness of some far-off night
Thy timid flame lightened while one of old,
Fair as a poet master ever told,
Clad all in dreams of love and of delight,
Paused by the court-yard fountain's splashing
 slight,
Herself and thee wave-blotted to behold;
Or the faint shimmering marble stairway cold,
Touched with a sandalled footfall, young and
 bright :

Thou hadst no honor more in that sweet sight,
Nor in the touch of that proud little hand,
 Than shall be thine again, true Minister !
Aye, whom thou seekest, with that past delight
Thou mayst compare, — if any dream may stand
 In her fair sight, so far, far lovelier.

Life Pleads

O strong-winged Soul, that o'er the waste
And perilous sea hast led my flight,
The way thy trusted genius traced,
Persistent toward the kindly light !

Oft had my weak wings failed, but thou,
Thy broad-spread pinions placed beneath,
Upheldst me high ; — O once more now
Lend me thine aid ; I sink to death.

The Struggle

Heart, we will strive for life, —
That thou with mind and sense no more at strife
Mayest twine the threefold thread
Perfect, as in the white the blue and green and red.

O stern and splendid and inviting Earth,
Summoning the heart's worth!
The great still laws confront us; death and pain
And boundaries of impotence and fear,
Bringing to naught false yearnings and false dreams
Ever with facts again;
Dread barriers uncreate! but radiant streams
The tide of Life about them and above;
The fair Earth buds and blooms through all her
length

With rapturous joy and love
And urgent strength,—
Winning us on beyond our powers, alas!
To think, to feel, to cause to come to pass;
And we weep thoughtless tears, think heartless
thought,
And act a-wrong the lessons Time hath taught.

Yet is Life always lovable and dear;
And to drink down that beaker to the lees,
To know and love and do—what dreams like these,
Haunting us year on year!

Ah for the bond
And measure between power and each event !
For glorious sanity, all else beyond !
Ah for Truth's loveliest daughter, high Content !
That sense no longer blind
May stoop with trust,
And in the simple visions of the dust,
In commonest flower or man its lofty concord find.

For no more moaning of supreme desire
Outside the fast-barred and unwilling door,
Where golden senses strain
And reason tugs in vain,
Till Hope departs as if to come no more ;
While life's fair fire of its own fuel chokes,
Smoulders and sinks and smokes.

For no more yearning with that other pain,
When the hungry heart goes searching far and
near,
And up and down o'er desert hill and plain,
Its food and proof, comfort of Heaven here.
(Since Truth one test alone will have or can,
The touch of Earth with the live heart of Man.)

O Heart, yield not thy perfect ancient trust
In Honesty and the full-granted Light ;
Seek still the patient service-lands of Right ;
Seek Purity and Love ; — be as thou wast :
So mayest thou understand the glory-enfured
Tremendous acts and dreams and passions

That earnest manhood fashions
Changing the natural worth of the old subject
world :

O there the Earth's sane heart,
Big with the worth of living, hath her part,
Abiding far from the barren ways of strife,
And all these errant whims our blindlings take
for life.

And she shall answer Patience ; her estate
They know at length that wisely struggle on,
Following, tho' dulled, the best that may be won ;

Heeding the faint, high callings soon and late.

O Heart, it is our will to be thus strong ;

It is our will to bear and not abate ;

Nor do we yield us now, although the weight
Grows weary, and the way seems endless long :

Better this hard-won way,

Than yield a whit of the eternal day ;

Better this light tho' dim,

Than all the scorner's ease may comfort him.

Heart, we will strive toward life.

The perfect life, twining the threefold thread

Of passion, thought, and sense, no more at strife,

As in the purest white, its blue and green and red.

To Spring, Her Picture

This is the time when birds to song awaken,
And blue-eyed Flora hath had her picture taken.
She sitteth as ye see her, simple, calm ;
A snowy cape clingeth against her arm.
Her head is like a tulip's on its stem ;
And those gold locks, the wind hath played with
them.

She looketh, see, unto the days of June ;
Rough days have been, but sunshine followeth
soon :

Even now her lips, unless she doth dissemble,
With a still smile are moving half a-tremble ;
And tho' her eyes brood with the sense of peace,
The gratitude and joy of her release,
Already she is scattering and o'erturning
Ashes of memory, and she is learning
That if she willeth, she may have her way,
Idle and dance and sparkle the livelong day ;
That she may toss the wintry cape aside,
That she may laugh, coquette, yes, even deride.
Tomorrow cometh ; and her happy look
Will shine and dimple like the meadow brook :
Then ye shall see what broidery hath her dress !
Then ye shall feel the season's witching stress !
But now with tenderer gentleness still unshaken,
She sitteth sweet and hath her picture taken.

December Morning

Long last night the hours of darkness
From the stillest skies their snows bestowed ;
Nature's laughing, cunning fingers
On every sprig piled high the load.

Down across the buried meadows
I wade now early the trackless snow ;
Deep beneath their balanced burdens
The hemlock boughs bend graceful low.

Drifting, shining, break the vapors,
And let the dauntless sunlight through ;
Flush the flooded fields and highlands
With glory, and bring the brightening blue.

Comes the North Wind, rogue, unwarning :
"Awake ! Awake ! Ye sleepers all !"
Half disturbs the ever slumberers,
Who shuddering let their burdens fall.

Laughs the wind ; loud laughs the weather ;
Wild toss the blind and helpless trees !
Towering staid old stupid Titans,
What should they make of pranks like these !

Deep beneath the blue and brightness,
Through whirling gust and snowy wings,
Nature simple, large, according,
Her demon broodings regnant sings.

In Spring

Spirit still hid from me through many a year,
Through hours of joy, through desert days
and blind!

Spirit, at length across the realms of mind,
Thy voice comes strong and clear,
Filling with glory all the turbulent glen,
And with such yearning as in hearts of men
Thou utterest when thy vision draweth near
The spirit of eye and ear.

The swollen brook that roars and surges,
Stirring with hollow sound the rocks that it
submerges—

The waves uproarious,
The sturdy checks laborious,
Are full of thee :

Dully thou broodest in their furious strife
Thy fundamental passions, wide, immortal,
Having not yet found the free-towering portal
Of death and life,
With the imperfect joys of high mortality.

(So the great earth through space
Chants to the swinging wandering spheres afar
The song of star to star.

From heavy core and from majestic face,
From tempest-tossing seas,
From cornered crags that bleak and bare,

Jut to the whirling breeze ;
From clouds that wake the threatening thunder's
blare,
While deep to deep replies
With rolling muttering that unwilling dies ;
From all the voice unheard
Sounds, brooding on, God's first eternal word.)

O Thought, in what dim chasms didst thou grope,
Ere thou hadst found man's life and light and
hope !

These tall, gaunt pines the silvery mists have
caught —

These are thy wanderings that the heart perceives
With thee full-fraught ;
Dark, helpless creatures,

But conscious of the day, all their dim natures
Rising in heavy dreams, now the old winter
leaves ;

Now that the sun comes north,
And will with joy drive forth
The warden of their prison —
Wake from their sheaths the flower and butterfly,
And the long, lithe twigs that lie
Ready to startle like a mystic vision.

Nor is the coming distant of a horde
To speak thy nobler word.

Even now the birds are up and on their way,
Haling along the Spring's triumphal car
Without too long delay.

O even now their voices are not far!
Days shall scarce pass ere the wind-driven crow
And the even-sailing blackbird here shall rest,
Seeking again the haunts of the years ago,
And the bare, deserted nest.
The squirrel too shall scamper on the rail
And chatter in the trees; and on the ground
The rabbit beat defiance: nor shall fail
The predatory fox's barking sound.

O crooning mother-echo strong and dear,
Thou stopst not here!
In human hearts is not thy joyance clear?
In human souls art thou not yearning still?
The clean fair city rising from the wave,
The scattered ships, the bright flags flying free,
Are sweet with thee:
The roaring chaos of the thundering mill,
The field where man's hard hand earns blazonry,
Are sweet with thee;
The halls where high religion chants her stave,
The towers where clear-eyed lore murmurs
victoriously,
Are sweet with thee!
So strivest thou ever up, forever failing,
Towards heights thine own attempts forever are
unveiling.

Lovely and splendid art thou, O Mother eternal,
O radiant Truth!

Wasteful and plenteous as youth!
Brave with a sweetness and beauty supernal!
But O above thy flowery crown,
What future lovers, what tempests frown!
So doubtful seems the meed,
Grim Death so nears,
Our human-throbbing hearts with passion bleed,
When thy blind simple joyousness to them appears.

Yet is there stirring comfort: — Surely we,
When of thy favors thou art kind —
When our held sense thou dost unbind,
Thine aids may be;
Following with heart and will, searching with
mind,
Thy dim ambitions;
And in the teeth of natural oppositions,
(Beating of wave on wave,
Where thy wide waters rave)
Bringing to pass what thy glad instinct feels —
Thy peoples struggling up to still unknown
ideals.
Therefore thou comest to us; therefore man
May find thee when thou willest;
Therefore when patience and stern passions scan
Thy forms unnumbered thou their yearning
stillest.

For not unsought
Comest thou down, not unto those untaught;

Even the native pure of heart with pain,
And with long hoarding of the spirit's gain,
Prepare them ere the unfolding vision rise
Before their gentle eyes :
And what a war is theirs and what a strength
Is theirs who but at longest length,
Smile with eyes cleared by woes,
Winning thee through a host of deathlike throes !
A year is but a day,
Spent in this way :
And all the powers of youth are not so strong
That they can fend such soul from wandering
oft in wrong.

O many a night shall he outwatch with pain
Sloughing the laden weights from off the soul,
Turning the sullen fact to living gain :
Taking to very heart the earth ;
Giving the ancient law new birth ;
Learning to grasp the moment ere it wane.
Learning to cross the chasm from the word,
To the live thought that like a conscience guides
it ;
Learning at last from the deep sea that hides it,
To summon many a spirit of the dead
Back through the charm right-read,
Of potent truth, beauty, and purity.
Aye, the poetic vision to him shall seem
A working of his own inspired heart,
The tracing of the substance of a dream

Whereof his soul, unknowing-free,
Was ever part.
O thou that dawnest, O thou utmost best !
Coming, and still but guest ;
Perfect thyself on earth ! to all grow clearer !
To all come nearer !

Come ! and no more beneath the whitening morn,
While the cramped soul stretches its bonds in
vain,
Walk thou unseen with scarce-heard foot-steps
fair,
Or trailing of faint skirts o'er the wide plain,
Beneath the wavering star, in the clear seas of air.

Come ! and no more beneath the blessed morn,
While all the earth around
In a flash is holy ground,
May our souls shrink as some vast portal clashes,
And the glory fades down into dust and ashes —
The old world and self-scorn.

Inform us rather, — as in that far day,
When knowledge, dwarf but hoary,
Told, tho' in lies, thy story ;
When simple hearts found thee beside the way,
Found thee upon the sunny laughing plains,
Mother, and giver of eternal joy !
They might adorn thee with their highest gains,
Put all to this employ ;
Clothe thee with loveliest fancies, radiant dreams,

And draw to mortal eyes the tender lines
Of thy divinity. Is then our sin
Out of redemption, for our bold designs?
O through the law send us thy living gleams,
And dwell with us as then, both kind and kin!

Methinks I hear the singing of the time,
Not distant far, when the eternal truth
Shall be no goal of an all-patient climb,
But near and common word unto our youth,
Ready to open like a flower,
If with him light shall find her hour.

Methinks I see the glimmering of the age,
When the bleak world's dark scientific rage
Shall reach the splendid goals it struggles for;
And, opening every door,
Shall let in life — and the quickening sunlight
warm,
And grow in sweetness, gentleness and charm;
Build up a store of memoried tenderness
On the new earth, the dear old home to bless;
Bring in the spirit dreamed to have been of old —
At last, the Age of Gold.

O murmuring Spirit of the dreaming Spring!
Who will resist thy progress? Who not love?
The throes are hard; the triumphs sad to bring;
The new true life far on the heights above;
But O fair World, dreaming the coming thing,
Who will resist thy progress? Who not love?

The White-Throat

When new leaf-clusters grace the trees,
Like swarms of emerald butterflies ;
When violets, touched o' the wooing breeze,
Look from the grass with heaven's own eyes ;
What mood is this that swells thy throat
To music in a minor note :

Joyance — passes, it passes, it passes, it passes !

Scarcely the first white petals fall
From off the bride-clothed cherry and plum ;
Scarcely the finch's ringing call
Tells us the elm's green fruit is come ;
No browning leaf, no joyless thing,
And still thy piping carols ring :

Joyance — passes, it passes, it passes, it passes !

Thou meanst it not ; 'tis love or mirth ;
When hath thy soul envisaged Fate ?
Thou scratchest on the brown old earth
Contented, by thy modest mate.
But hark ! again ! and at the strain
Comes back Spring's longing, yearning pain :
For *joyance — passes, it passes, it passes, it
passes !*

Flight-Song

Are we not the happiest of mortals,
You and I, — the luckiest, happiest mortals !
Are we not the blessedest of all mortals —
We who love each other with all our hearts !

Glad as if no good could be withheld us !
Scoffing as if wisdom mattered nothing .
Laughing as if love were all-sufficient —
We who love each other with all our hearts

Are we not the foolishest of mortals —
Maddest, rashest, foolishest of mortals !
Are we not the absurdest of all mortals —
We who love each other with all our hearts !

Sure of joy to-morrow and forever !
Sure of the good old, wise old world forever !
Sure of our own hearts forever and ever —
We who love each other with all our hearts !

Are we not the maddest of all mortals !
Foolishest, luckiest, happiest of all mortals !
Are we not the blessedest of mortals !
We who love each other with all our hearts !

The Field-Sparrow

Thou gentlest charm the summer yields,
And men neglect !
Shy genius whom the sunny fields
Love and protect !
If merit in the Muses' train
Bearth the palm, thy simple strain
Shall not be always sought in vain
Among the elect.

The bobolink by joyous right
Doth praise receive ;
The oriole to the farm's delight
His nest doth weave ;
The robin hath our daily love ;
The bluebird no neglect shall prove ·
Or thrushes in the shady grove
At holy eve.

Each hath his time and place ; and thou
Hast thine own worth,
Chanting in fields the earnest plow
Hath left to dearth.
O many a year upon the hill
I've paused to hark thy mellow trill,
And ever with a gentler thrill
Toward Mother Earth.

Wild-carrot and the bane all over
Run riot there ;
St. John's wort, rag-weed, and the clover
As equals share ;
The sumach too has found its way,
Stark-rooted in the yellow clay ;
And Nature laughs in the decay
Of human care.

And thou, the sweetest of the wild,
Hast there thy nest ;
And that rude bosom undefiled
Thou findest best ;
There from a heart that's clear and true,
Thou singest thy song forever new,
And wooest me to the fallows too
That I may rest.

O when dark self its way hath had
With threat and scorning ;
When Science makes all strivings sad
With sternest warning ;
Methinks thou sayest " She is not grim ;
But Mother, and her heart doth brim,
Even in wildness with such hymn
As I am learning."

At Sea

Slight bird of land,
What dost thou here in the great wastes of sea ?
Dost understand
That ceaseless lapping of hungry waves ? That
glee ?
That reaching up as of a salty hand ?
That calm that waiteth unwavering-patiently
With its demand ?

Like a lone soul
Seemest thou driven over the dubious main,
Seeking some goal
Strange to thy fellows on the blasts of pain ;
But what art thou in this unmeasured whole ?
What are the miles thy beating wing may gain,
Where thousands roll ?

Aye, God doth save
The petrel, frail and wavering as thou ;
It walks the wave
And lives, through Him ; and great gulls doth He
endow
To join their cry where the grim waters rave :
To them land-beating doth He strength allow —
To thee, a grave !

So evermore
Wait the dread laws upon our being laid ;
 Stained deep with gore
Lie the stern boundaries, the disobeyed ;
Yet do the ships of man pass o'er and o'er,
Patient and good, bearing their comfort and aid
 Ev'n at Death's shore.

Alas, shy thing !
Thou veerest off ; canst thou not pause nor rest ?
 With failing wing
Fearest us still ? Knowest not this is best ?
Thou fittest on ; I hear thee faintly sing. —
Peace to thee, bird, when ends o'er ocean's crest
 Thy wavering !

Thanksgiving

What wilt thou sing to-day,
O Heart, that standest on the heights of joy,
And drinkst thy fill of the radiant happiness ?
Not a mere wordless chant be thine employ,
But join thy thoughts thereto and bless
With thy high ecstasy
Warmed to a human sympathy,
The power that hath found thee by the way.

No longer now delay,
But sing ! thou throbbing creature half a-wing !
How camest thou here where sky and golden
clouds,
Valley and hill this new-born glory shrouds ?
Sing !

I

Not unto us the praise
If after darkling days
At length the glory find us ;
And if not all in vain
With yearning and with pain
Our human being bind us :
Man's labor never dreamed, nor hope conceived
The worth he hath received.

II

How should I see aright,
Who stumbled toward the light
 Like all earth's weak and ailing ;
Or after should I know
How the free-granted glow
 Found me still wandering, failing :
God's love will not be bidden nor be bound.
 It is. It may be found.

III

As the seed lay nor grew
All the long winter through,
 (So dull was Nature lying !)
Came the new mystic call
And changed its being all
 With a passion like to dying :
Out of the depths it cried to unknown light,
 Struggling, God knew, a right.

IV

How many hours unblest,
What days of deathlike rest,
 Ah, soul ! within earth's prison !
Till at the last — despair,
Loneliness, senseless care,
 Thrilling to gathered vision —
Sudden the bursting light, the added power,
 And the towering up to flower !

V

(Thou givest faith, O Life,
To those who in thy strife
 Struggle nor yield — art kindly ;
And thy high will is done,
Weaving the world in one,
 Whether we labor blindly,
Or in thy light feel the eternal tie
 Of the springs that inmost lie.)

VI

The glow o'er seas and lands
And the work of men's hands,
 I thank thee for, O Giver !
The trust of human worth
In birth and in rebirth
 To rise — and to deliver ;
I thank thee for — and beauty beyond sense,
 With love's experience.

VII

Thou who dost keep and cause
Thy beings and thy laws,
 Thus fit for wondrous using ;
Who mak'st us know the lights
Upon our mortal heights,
 And mate, perhaps, thy musing !
Within thy hand — as listening to thy voice —
 I rest and I rejoice.

Autumn

Now when the lovely child was laid in earth
Under the trees where the autumnal rain
Freshened the brilliant leaves, new fallen and
light,

They two whom the late summer of their life
Touched to a similar glory, turned them back
With firm and gentle steps, tho' desolate,
To their accustomed place. But when the night
Shut the world out, and by the study fire
They sat amid the old things of the home,
Furnishings, paintings, sketches, books — half
breathing

In the rich halo of long thought and use,
The loneliness came on them and the mother
(The last being gone of those who called her so)
Catching a sobbing breath, put forth her hand,
And Philip drew her to him, and they wept
Quietly; and for long they spoke no word.
Then in the end, out of the poignant present,
(What charm wish we for grief? — But life re-
mains.)

The thoughts of both went wandering in the past;
And Philip spoke, while she half heard, half
dreamed,
The words through which they went on as one
heart:

“ And yet our life is good, is it not, Elsie?
And fair proportioned and true, both first and last
Planned simply and then generously done;
And every feature dear to memory,
Like Nature’s own. Shall I go over it?

We loved the spring days and the orchards first.
Then, as we’d walk along the lanes and paths,
Amid the fragrant prodigal-blossomed boughs,
And ’neath the blue that, with its sunny clouds,
Shone in a radiant loveliness, we too
Felt the cool vigor of the teeming air,
Felt the green-sprouting riches of the earth —
The spring-time crowding every natural door;
And we would closer draw, being at one
With all the exuberant life; and when a bird
Sang passionately with quivering wings and throat,
We’d stop, and — Hark! our own brown thrush
sang for us,

Nor needed other words between our hearts.
Or down amid the city’s toil we’d walk,
Feeling the stir of man and beast and thing —
The voices, rumbling wheels, the trampling feet;
And we divined the thing we could not know,
Man’s life, that gives to labor its fine meanings,
Half fruitage and all flower to the heart.

How far and sweet that glory, and how sad
Now, with its full live days of happiness —
Blunders and half-successes and mighty plannings!
How far beyond our depth we ventured boldly!

How little knew of truth! Then in the evenings,
When we sat by the fire, as we sit now,
And your rich hair lay thus against my shoulder,
Your face raised up sober to mine, as now,
How sweet the talk! We'd say that life's a river;
Here now it laughs and bubbles over shallows;
Now it descends with a roaring fall; or here
It stops and spreads in patient quietness.
And we would suit us to it — would be patient,
Active or glad, smiling at seeming stoppage:
'First we'll be worthy — gather force and grow;
The lake shall 'scape where the slight stream has
failed.'

Would we recall those days of eager dreams,
And countless eager actions? Surely not;
Yet who could live them better. In profusion
And loveliness we lived them, guessing, hoping,
Amid the grace this flower or that should grow
To be the summer's pride. O well we knew
The final word was God's, but in ourselves
We felt His power undismayed and strong,
And underneath the fair exuberance,
The hard and undeveloped fruit to come.
But better days have followed. Soon 'twas
summer —
Coming scarce noted. We had valued life
Ever; and early, in our youthful way,
Learned by sweet thoughts to cure our hearts of
wrong,

And 'give to the hands of circumstance, that
played,
A truthful answer'; now the power grew;
And, first obedient, we could live beyond:
For every year was laden with old truths
New-born for us, and with each opening year,
The old world grew more real, and we more
surely

Moved with its life to help its destined ends,
And knew our use and value in the maze:
So we were ready to yield or to command,
But always purposeful and that purpose high,
Quiet and sane — a feeling at the heart —
An instinct, when it settled there with years,
And the grasp grew an almost godlike sense.
When did it come — how gradually it came! —
That mood which is for us the world's solution,
And sets us free of facts? Since then, at least,
We've filled our days with actions, confident,
And we have fused each business to our hearts,
And loved the least details, putting in all
A patient firmness, in the plowman's manner,
Giving yet holding true. Solemnly, dear,
And reverently we review our busy years —
Our busy double score — and they are good,
A constant benediction and reward.

For not in fame nor proud discoveries,
But in good days added to days as good,
With a true happiness that cannot stale,

But lies in memory ever sweet and young
And strengthening — in this we found life's worth.
And now tho' desolate, we are not forlorn;
And surely now the years rise to the proof,
When life which might seem emptied of its all,
Rests back secure on human gentleness
Persistent over wreck.

Dear, you remember
But lately how we walked the autumn lanes.
The hillside-woods were glorious; gums and
sumachs
Flamed; and the maple's yellow and red out-
shone.
'Twas beautiful — and pure as parents' love;
And even so generous; not for selfish ends,
Not for exuberant love the scene was sweet;
The songsparrow trilled as shy within the hedge
As a passionless child; the small white butterflies
That fluttered about each other and up in air,
Had only the charm of passion; by the path
Grew clouds of asters, and within the fields
Sunflowers and goldenrods smiled up to heaven,
Soft with its hazy blue. And we stepped firmly,
Drawing in deep the dry and fragrant air,
And knowing life is good — not spring alone,
With flowering wealth, nor summer's fruits, but
this —
Nearest to what we dream in earthless hours.

And I spoke for us both the peace we felt :
' All times are good, and we have trusted all.
We change, and cannot pause — life has its course.
This we foresaw long since and realized ;
'Tis this we would have focused! in each moment
To find its special worth and its proportions :
So in the spring we sighed not overmuch
For the fruits, but had our blossoms; and in
summer
Were well content without the fruit-tree's petals
That one time fell like fairy snows; we saw
How well-becoming shone the grain in the sun,
And apples ripening; so now in autumn
We'll gather up the long and lovely past,
And find life beautiful, generous and pure ;
Loving these latter glories in their turn.'

It is so still, Elsie, tho' one great joy
Be gone from us, (gone without bitterness,
Though with a loss heightened of hope and glad-
ness)

And we must now go on, live on alone. —
Life narrows, but its health and poise remain ;
Nor shall grief shake them, but our hearts of
course

Take up our long sweet list of years together,
And lead them tho' more frugal forward still.
Ah, Elsie! parting, death — is that not Time?
But human loveliness, like Nature's flowers,
Seems but the fairer for its frailty

And dearer in our thought — and such is she ;
And bright forever to us, and fresh and young,
Like her fair sisters and our stout bold boy. —
O as we turn back to our old good ways,
We'll take up life with added gentleness,
Nor love it less that our small share of it
Stands baring to the blasts — close upon winter ;
But we'll be true to it and to our love,
And to our grief, since that must also be,
Frankly and simply as the season suits."

He ceased, and at some turning in the words,
She drew still closer, tho' her changeless eyes
Were fixed like his in musing. Long they sat
thus —

Like two young lovers by the unresting sea,
The last day of their summer ; here they met ;
Here they have passed the days of the new life —
Days haply troubled of outward circumstance,
But full of worth beyond what hearts may grasp :
Now is the end approaching, and they sit
Looking out soberly across the waves,
Finding no words and almost no caress :
Quiet is now the thought upon the end,
Clear tho' heartbreaking the big yearning present,
But both of them hear well the surge of Time
Unchanging, sounding vainly at their feet.

In Absence

1

Dear, the light of hourly meeting,
Through the long, the summer days,
Rainbow-changing, rainbow-fleeting,
Serving love a thousand ways —

It is gone. The envious season
Down has turned the final page ;
Time is come, alas ! for reason —
Absence, and imprisoning cage.

Yet the bird will sing, undaunted,
Joys that scarce again may be,
Tender raptures, memory-haunted,
Of the loved one far and free ;

And at Memory's blessed chalice
I carouse our happy lot ;
And the cage grows to a palace,
And the bars are quite forgot ;

Riotously Love seizes power ;
Overflows the room with light ;
Conquers, hour on cheery hour,
Time and Space and Fortune's spite.

2

When to the light my spirit wakes,
I miss thee ever ;

Slowly the long day measure takes ;
Wakest thou then ?

Through the day, too, as pleasures rise,
I miss thee ever ;
Upon my lips the smile half sighs.
Where art thou then ?

But when at eve the darkness falls,
Ah, the long time, dear one !
Ah, then what spirit cries and calls,
Dreamest thou then ?

3

The wild bird shut within the cage
Will not be always wooed to song ;
Nor can his spirit ever wage
Successful strife with grief and wrong.

For when the swallow wings him south,
And in the field the sumach burns,
To him too speaks the spirit mouth,
And southward with his kind he turns.

He beats against the hemming bars,
And cries with fear and with despair ;
The while his mate beneath the stars
Swings softly through the southern air.

How shall she live, her love away ?
Is that her note ? Is that her moan ?

He cannot yield nor Fate obey ;
He maddens in the frozen zone !

Dear, when the shadow o'er me steals,
There comes a time, there comes a thrill,
When the fierce grief the wild bird feels
Is my heart's beyond power of will.

With broken wings distended wide,
It beats the bars with baffled pain ;
Or wildly turns to the other side,
To find the impassive bars again.

4

White the fields and fair the day ;
Bitter the winds in the woodland way ;
Low I bow against the storm ;
Strive in vain to keep me warm.

But within my ears a song
Sounds jubilant the whole way long.
Ne'er hath Earth more pleased the mind ;
Never seemed more simply kind.

And beneath the blustering skies
I reason deeply in this wise : —
“ If thus Nature grants thee grace,
Turns thee soft her loveliest face ;
“ If thy path there ever crowd
Elves in a merry circling cloud,

And thou walk'st as artists paint
With cherub comforters the saint :

“ This is no hard thing to clear ;
Could'st thou hold thy lady dear,
Yet mid sprites of the forest grove
Walk hostile? Love they not thy love ?

“ When she treads the woodland green
She is of them — is their queen.
And they sing in nook and dell
For thee — because thou lov'st her well.”

5

The eager flame leaps up apace ;
It throws deep quivering shades ; it lights
The royal antlers in their place —
And me it gives my rights.

Here Love o'erstrays prophetic strings,
To argue much of thee and Fate ;
The flame leaps lightly and snaps and sings,
And I am strong to wait.

6

There is no charm of rich or rare
In Nature, but thou seem'st in all.
The first frail flower in April's air
Stirs not more yearning, nor gentian in the fall.

Nor crystal spring, nor coolest glade,
Nor hermit bird, nor tremulous wind,
Nor piled-up whiteness the morn hath made;
Theirs and thy charm are of no different kind.

And like some fragrant hot-house thing,
Big with the wealth of far-off skies
And warmths of some more passionate spring,
Thou seemest not less, such light upon thee lies ·

For dreamer art thou from thy birth; —
And dreamest the world so richly true!
What sweet solutions, proved of worth,
Smile in the happy eyes thou lookest through!

7

My memory shall treasure till it die
A certain sunshine and a certain sky;
A certain garden, green and fair in May;
The lawn, the seats, the neatly gravelled way.

Not always are the gods to mortals kind;
The threads of Fate were snarled time out of mind.
And when She wrote: "I bring my friend with
me,"

I guessed a wrong, rebelling stubbornly.

Yet how it comes back! She and I alone;
The garden old; the city's muffled tone.
We chatted long; did some sad dream of man
Smile as those last unconscious minutes ran?

Time paused well pleased, and sudden from the
bush

The blackbird sang — then all the world was hush ;
I turned and it was thou ! She said : “ My
friend.”

And suddenly, amazed, life found its end.

Ah, scarcely did we dare then understand
That first long look, first tone, first hand in hand ;
But the wise blackbird knew, took up his lay ;
And life began for us — and it was May.

8

Within thine eyes I learned at length
The slow fruition of the years ;
Of vaguest yearning's constant strength,
Of constant strength of fears.

Feeling is first. What youth may know
The goals his mind hath will to reach !
Through what wild whims, what restless woe,
What seeming fatal breach !

Yet youth sloughs off the false intents ;
Persists, and is not led astray ;
And through the chaos of events
Dame Nature picks his way.

Slowly he builds with growing trust,
His home of purpose and of thought ;

Grows clear of eye, of arm robust,
Of heart experience-taught.

But late do oft the mists depart :
The burdened years may come and go,
And still go on, nor to the heart
Its loveliest spirit show ;

Which yet long since was there, was heard
Selecting, ruling from its place ;
Patient waiting the solving word
To show its powerful face.

Dear, when I looked into thine eyes,
Thought'st thou what vision smiled, released?
Nay, we both knew with what deep sighs
Our hearts their wealth increased.

9

Loud with song are the woods and meadows ;
Strown with glory the morning grass ;
Fair old native hills and valleys,
Shout ! her train comes through the pass !

Still, my heart ! She comes ! Ah, patience !
Was she then so sweet with song ?
Was she then so fair ? Ah, patience !
She will be with us ere long.

Lo, the carrier, hurrying, eager,
Leaning splendid on the bend —

Slowing, panting, stops! — Ah, haste thee!
Haste, ere our few moments end!

Ah, my darling! fairer, lovelier
Than in those sweet foreign days!
Tearful eyes, and tremulous smiling,
While my soul Te Deum says!

Gone the train with clanging ringing,
With its precious burden gone:
And I stand like one enchanted —
Is it earth this happened on?

In the even constant weaving,
Thus it is that memory shows
How the Fates, of fertile fancy,
Sudden cast a glowing rose.

10

Tonight upon the wintry road
There fell about me a freezing dread;
And something spake, that by me strode:
“Thy gentle lady love is dead!”

In the western sky, black banks of cloud;
Through the dead trees the shivering wind; —
A grief inhuman, moaning loud,
As if the world to fall inclined.

And then it seemed that Time was done,
And Death must take all Nature soon;

While in the east rose the red cold sun,
And shed a radiance like the moon.

So Horror strode the landscape o'er
In that dim light of final gloom ;
With Sirius twinkling as of yore,
Shimmeringly, on the old world's doom.

11

O she was very love's own friend,
That bade us to her mountain Towers,
With lakes and shadowy vales to lend
Their loveliness to happy hours.

There through the long deliberate days,
We conned the whims of our mighty mood ;
And proved at length the unending ways
That life is sweet and fair and good.

Till now the gathered memory rings
Like echo answering o'er and o'er ;
Or like those long melodious strings
Struck, which the whole harp trembleth for.

And as the tender-curling shell,
The waves caressed and summer loved,
Its sea-born passion museth well,
Howe'er tossed up and far removed ;

So in our hearts there murmurs round
That mountain voice, content and strong ;

Life cannot breathe but that some sound
Renews the sweet incessant song.

There is no grove nor any dell
But of our joyance hath its tone ;
Nor any seat by wayside well,
Nor in the Towers any stone.

12

Old Coachman, come for my love and me,
Drive slow !
If thy heart e'er faltered the end to see,
Drive slow !
Aye, spare thy horses, for the day is long ;
And the way, it calls for the fresh and strong ;
Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow !
Slow, Old Coachman, on the stretch have a care !
Drive slow !
For the rains have washed it, and the jolting stones
are bare ;
Drive slow !
Up hill we go now, the sun in our face ;
The horses struggling ; need we go at such a pace ?
Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow !
Here the meadows, and the brookside gay ;
Drive slow !
The school-house, dear one ; the children at their
play ;

Drive slow!

Water now thy horses, while we greet them ere we
pass.

Good-day, thou little rogue! A drink, thou merry
little lass?

Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow!

Up again the valley, and the sun is at our side;

Drive slow!

What a smiling cottage, dear, the doors and win-
dows wide!

(Drive slow!)

Such a gentle home, and such a garden sweet be
ours;

Such serene and full contentment the sunny summer
hours!

Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow!

Slow, Old Coachman, for the glorious view!

Drive slow!

The road turns gently — Ah, the end's there too!

Drive slow!

Down slants the sun, and the way's down hill;

But the fields are fragrant, the road fair still!

Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow!

How the wind stirs cool as the day declines!

Drive slow!

See, love, the spire — 'tis a church mid the pines!

(Drive slow!)

And the graves — where old friends resting lie.
And the wreaths of memory — it is here they die.
Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow!

The storm comes on, and the rain will pour;
Drive slow!
Hold well thy horses while the thunders roar!
Drive slow!

O lady sweet, come close in my arm;
We can smile together at the lightning's harm.
Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow!

Alas! the towers! but our friends are near!
Drive slow!
The rest of the night — but our day was dear!
Drive slow!

The carriage rattles; the air grows damp;
The pace grows quick, by the horses' tramp.
Drive slow, Old Chronos, slow!

Ah, the even crushing of the gravelled way!
Drive slow!

Must we soon descend, Old Coachman? Nay!
Drive slow!

— Step down, dear! since more is beyond our
powers,
And the years are spent of our few long hours.
Well! — Our thanks, Old Chronos slow!

Dost thou remember, dear, the night,
 The fragrant air, the showering rain,
 The lamp behind scarce shedding light,
 The scarce-felt breeze's rise and wane?

No sound but that of splashing drops,
 High from the old and mossy eaves ;
 Or from the near-by linden copse,
 Contented sighings of the leaves.

Hushed and at peace we stood and heard ;
 And soft our hearts one measure kept ;
 In the old trees a stirring bird
 Chanted a grateful prayer — and slept.

O sweet, thus love is calm and true ;
 And simple, like the unbidden wind ;
 Fresh as a rose deep-drenched with dew ;
 And strong as is the eternal mind.

Therefore it gusheth like the springs,
 Or rageth thunderous in its might ;
 Therefore its note old ocean sings,
 And of its loveliness the night :

And therefore for us moon and sun
 And stars in radiant beauty shine ;
 Nor is there aught that man hath done,
 But it is henceforth thine and mine.

Nature in spite of all we do,
 And all the excellence brought to birth,
 Keeps footing sure the ages through,
 And walketh firm the mother earth.

Cares grow complex and curious-fine ;
 The spoils of time are more and more ;
 Hearts build their palaces divine ;
 And still the structure is of yore.

And thou, of our full day the grace,
 I know not what of joy and pain
 Lurks round thy form and in thy face,
 Of things that will not be again.

Looked she then so whom chiefs of old
 Would beat with spears and lead away?
 Rememberest how stout knights and bold
 Couched lance to win thee in ringing fray?

Such visions hover round thee still,
 Thou gentlest woman, thou humble strong !
 And through thy smile, and thy yielding will,
 Shine passionate ages of honor and wrong.

To-day at last ! at last the words " We come. "
 And as a train, tho' far and hidden still,
 Shakes the firm earth, murmuringly at first,
 Ere it appears with glorying shriek and roar

Leaning upon the curve ; then looms majestic,
Coming in swiftly with its thundering weight
Over the bright steel way ; and with firm brakes
Slows up and stops and rests, panting with power
Before the platform, overrun with folk,
(Friends, relatives, and servants, all are there.)
Waiting till from the cars the new-come throng
Descend ; and there begins a calling, seeking, —
Glad handshakes, kisses, smiles, laughter, — yes,
tears ;
While heavy trunks and bags, loaded up high
On mighty trucks, force a slow noisy course,^d
And at one side cabmen and porters bawl,
With barefoot newsboys seeking eager trade ;
The whole place now a happy deafening tumult :
So did my mind grow from the words “ We
come.”

16

If thou hast mourned and suffered long,
Hast given thy heart all up to grief ;
And nigh to death thy being strong,
Ere soothing came relief ;

Who had surmised it? Few but thou
Could so meet sorrow, and look up
Full simply to its veiled brow,
And drain the tearful cup.

And thus thy sorrow on thy soul
Hath left no scar nor stinging wound ;

But bade the wretched burdens roll
Tenderly to the ground.

Doubtless it left its radiant share
In moods more blessed, tender, good ;
In deeper joyance, in thoughts more rare,
Dowering thy womanhood :

But who shall mark, that sees the rose,
What tempests beat its petals wide
The long nights through— what spirit of woes
Its queenly glory dyed !

17

Dost thou too think how we were late
That eve and sat alone at table?
Of the silent butler in his state,
And we as grave as we were able?

Our hearts how happy, mine how proud,
Only to dine thus, we together !
The thoughts we would not speak aloud
Opened like buds in wooing weather.

Run swiftly, Time, unto the day
Toward which thou ever, smiling, turnest !
The scene that once thou brought'st in play,
Bring soon again in tender earnest !

18

For sweetened power, for strengthened pride,
For sense unguessed of joy and pain,

For a new world of visions wide —
Old Truth and Right with Love's fresh gain ;

For these I thank thy heart and thee,
That led life to its new estate ;
And usher now the large to-be
Where wedded angels stand and wait.

19

The eager train, with thee its queenly guest,
Swept like a flying bird by river and hill,
As though it too followed an urgent will
Toward love that waited and towards the waiting
nest :

And thus ye passed : far in the evening west
I felt the happy monster, hurrying still,
Turn panting east, not to be stopped until
Its blessed flight should end where thou dost rest,

Not far now. Homesick long-pent-up desires
Have stormed all day ; they followed thee along ;
They wheel about thee now the course is done :
So did the weeks, like deeply smouldering fires,
Burst to hot flame this morning, when my song
Of " freedom " and " to-morrow " met the sun.



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